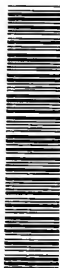


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Home College Series.

umber * Sixteen.

THE RAIN.

BY

MISS CARRIE R. DENNEN.

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1884.

THE "HOME COLLEGE SERIES" will contain one hundred short papers on a wide range of subjects—biographical, historical, scientific, literary, domestic, political, and religious. Indeed, the religious tone will characterize all of them. They are written for every body—for all whose leisure is limited, but who desire to use the minutes for the enrichment of life.

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J. H. VINCENT.

NEW YORK, Jan., 1883.

THE RAIN.

NATURAL HISTORY.

THE natural history of rain is this: Vapor is formed by heat from all bodies of water great and small, and from the moisture of the earth. This vapor ascends until it meets the cooler currents of air, where it is cooled, forming mist and clouds, and when sufficiently condensed, it falls in refreshing showers or storms. Each drop is formed according to a mathematical law, its size depending on the density or rarity of the atmosphere. These little drops are eased down to the earth on a cushion of air, as a wee babe on a pillow. Were it not for this air cushion they would come like so many bullets, cutting vegetation into shreds, pelting the cattle and wounding every unfortunate person caught out in a shower or storm. We should need umbrellas of sheet-iron, and clothes like the steel armor of the old warriors.

AMOUNT OF RAIN.

Three fourths of the earth's surface is a waste of water. The great ocean-basin in many places is miles in depth. The rain is born in the ocean and cradled in the clouds. The veins and arteries of mother earth are all full of this crystal elastic fluid. It circulates through all soils, and filters through the rocks even, vast rivers, like that in Mammoth Cave, creep along under ground, while sparkling springs leap and gush from the earth's bosom. Build your house anywhere, the ground beneath you contains the precious boon of water.

This is not all. From thirty-five to forty-five miles above us the air is all saturated with moisture. All the water of the earth was once in the clouds. Our usual annual rain-fall covers the whole globe to the depth of five feet. The earth,

then, all saturated with water, rolls along its orbit, wrapped in a wet blanket forty-five miles in thickness. Its surface is the bottom of another sea. We build cities and towns and railroads; we plant trees and fields; we think and speculate, plot and fight, laugh and weep, live and wed and die, on the floor of an ocean, compared with whose extent the Atlantic and Pacific are but drops.

More than this, even. Water fills every pore of our skins, the tiny cells of every leaf and plant and spire of grass. Our bodies are four fifths water. That liquid, then, which seems so utterly lifeless, walks in man; roams in the beasts of the field and forest; crawls in the serpent; soars in the eagle; swims in the fish; buds and blossoms in the rose; waves in great harvest fields, and shines in all the trees that fling their emerald banner to the skies. The vast abundance of water carries our thoughts up to the Creator, who alone is so liberal in all his ways.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF RAIN.

On large tracts of the earth's surface, owing to atmospheric currents and high ranges of mountains, it never rains, and we have great deserts, as Sahara and the Berean deserts. In other regions rains are periodical. It falls almost continuously for some months. Then it ceases for the remainder of the year. There are two seasons, a rainy season, followed by a dry season. In other regions it rains at short intervals during the entire year. Where the heat is greatest, as in the tropics, the rain-fall, though lasting for only a few months, is most abundant. It falls in torrents, often accompanied with terrific thunder and lightning. In the cooler zones the fall of rain is least, gradually decreasing the further north one goes.

Different years differ somewhat in the amount of the rain-fall. During some seasons the earth is parched with drought, while at other times it is flooded with water.

Very much of the wealth and prosperity of a land depends upon the distribution of the rain-fall. Summer drought starves a people, while winter floods sweep away millions of property. This unequal distribution is due to a great variety of causes, some known and more unknown.

USES OF THE RAIN.

The uses of the rain are many, curious, and instructive. As an agent in locomotion it serves a variety of ends. When seated in a finely upholstered car you are whisked across the continent; the rain supplies the power of locomotion. When the great steamship, with her thousands of tons of freight and hundreds of passengers, marches over the waves, tramping them under her keel, the rain bows its Titan shoulders and pushes at the pistons. In the form of water or steam, it moves the machinery of the world. The rain drops grind the food, weave the garments, forge the iron of the nations. The tramp of the machinery they drive shakes the solid earth. They toil in the mine and sweat at the forge, and belt the world with commerce. Were the rain-fall to cease all our industries would fail, and civilization and all progress come to a stand-still. The very sinews of our wealth and power are in the rain drops.

The rain moreover is the source of life. It is God's sustentation fund. Without rain life would become extinct. From the great oak to the lichen on its trunk; from the herds of elephants that roam the African forests, to the infusoria that dash about in a dew-drop by the millions; from the monsters of the deep to the animalculæ that crowd its water and flash in phosphorescent gleams on its crested surface, all draw their sustenance from the breast of the clouds. All races of men and species of animals and plants—the flowers and the grass, the fruit and vegetables, wheat and corn—live and breathe, get their fragrance and beauty, their taste and nutritive qualities, from the rain. We sow and

reap the rain. We eat and drink and wear the rain. We fill our barns and larders with the treasures of the clouds.

The rain not only supports life, but is a curative agent. It is one of nature's principal healing remedies. In ancient times springs and mineral waters were held in superstitious reverence and clothed with miraculous power. The old legendary writings are full of wonderful stories. According to one ancient author there was a spring that turned the animals white who drank of it; while another describes two springs, one of which strengthened memory, while the other destroyed it, visited by people who either wished to drown their sorrows or brighten up their memories. There were also supposed to be a great number of springs that furnished intoxicating waters, one of which, sacred to Bacchus, flowed at certain seasons of the year with wine. I am sorry to add that the number of intoxicating springs has not diminished in modern times, and, what is worse, they flow all the year round instead of periodically.

Even now the ignorant peasants of many countries tell strange stories concerning the marvelous properties of certain water which they believe in and almost reverence. We laugh at their superstition, but, nevertheless, consider many of these springs as wonderful as did the ancients, only in another way, and no one doubts their curative properties for a large class of diseases. According to a definition given by a celebrated physician, "a mineral water is a special beverage which has its own peculiar elements and special flavor, which nature has mixed by a certain kind of subtile chemistry." The temperature of the earth rises one degree with every one hundred feet below the surface. While many of these springs start out on mountain slopes and in valleys near the surface, there are those that sink deep into the earth's crust, where they are heated by the central fires of the globe. When they come to the surface they are so hot as to require hours of cooling before they can be used.

The hotter the spring the greater the depth from whence it comes. Hot springs usually hold in solution the greatest amount of mineral substances, and are most highly esteemed for medicinal purposes.

Among the most celebrated springs are those at Baden-Baden and Fredricksthal, in Germany; at Ragatz, in Switzerland; at Saratoga, and in the valley of the Genesee River, the White Sulphur Springs in Virginia, the sulphur springs of Arkansas, and in many other places in our own country. Their waters are taken both internally and are used for bathing, and are a specific for a large class of diseases—rheumatism, gout, heart disease, dyspepsia, diseases of the skin and the kidneys and other organs, and are a remedy for nearly every ill flesh is heir to. Nature has stored away somewhere in her myriad closets a mixture, of which water is the solvent, that is a specific for all classes and kinds of disease.

Bathing, also, is one of the luxuries of life. We ought to use the rain for this purpose with great freedom and frequency. So great are the curative properties of water now known to be, that schools of medicine are founded upon its use, which propose to treat all diseases by its application in various forms. This branch of the healing art was in use in Bible times, when Naaman, the Syrian, was ordered to dip in the Jordan. Elisha was a hydropathist. More and more is water becoming a medicinal remedy, both by internal and external application. Warm baths have been by far the most used, but the tendency now is to the cold. Warm or cold, internally or externally used, the rain is one of God's great specifics for the health of mankind.

In another way the rain conduces to health. It cleanses and sweetens both earth and air. There is a constant decay of vegetable and animal matter going on upon the earth. Without some means of carting away this decayed substance the very wings of the wind would droop with malaria and

the atmosphere become charged with poison and death. The rain comes riding down through the foul, smoky air, and washes it. The sky takes on a new and deeper blue. It dissolves, also, all decaying matter, carrying the nutritive properties down to feed the roots of vegetation, to bloom in the flowers, and ripen in the fruit, while it carts away the refuse material into brooks and rivers, to be dumped at last upon the floor of the sea and into the caverns of old ocean, which are vast and deep enough to hold the drainage of a continent, and salt enough to sweeten the corruption of a globe. All the men and horses and machinery in existence could not do a millionth part of the cleansing of one good hearty rain-storm. The rain-drops are God's scavengers. The clouds are nature's board of health. They go where no sanitary commission ever goes, where the eye of no policeman ever looks. They hunt out and hurry away all the noisome and poisonous sediment of city and town, and dump it into the sea, where the nostrils of man and beast shall never breathe it more. The contribution of the rain to the health of man and the cleanliness of his earthly home is one of its most significant uses.

The rain makes the earth beautiful as well as healthful. God has been at great and loving pains to fit up and adorn the home of his children. Were the rain-fall to cease, what desolation would creep over the earth? The springs would no longer flow, but become dry and ghastly, like the eye-sockets in a human skull. The rivers would become extinct, and their channels be long serpentine gashes on the face of the earth, while exhausted lakes and seas would pit and pock the land. The dead earth would roll through space a museum of dried plants and mummies.

But, with the rain coming often and gently upon it, how variously and wondrously beautiful it becomes! The fields are green, the flowers bloom, streams cross it in every direction, as threads of silver woven on cloth of emerald. The

woods fling their banners to the breeze and march over plain and hill, and wrap themselves about the loins of the mountains. The earth adorns herself as a bride for her husband.

In this way the rain becomes an esthetic agent, and ministers to man's intellectual, moral, and religious nature. There is that on all sides of us, the outcome of the rain, that awakens ideas of beauty, and thoughts of gratitude and love. Ten thousand forms of grace and strength address our senses, and kindle admiration. How much all men owe to their surroundings. The storm preaches. The brooks and rivers sing. The domed and pillared mountains lift their God-carved and snow-crowned capitals to fill our souls with ideals of grandeur and figures of strength. The intellect is broadened, the imagination inspired, the taste elevated, the *physique* improved, the whole man helped, both for the life that now is and for that which is to come, by the contribution of the rain. The rain-drops are the world's artisans. They clothe and drape the forest; they dome and decorate the heavens; they skirt the horizon with gorgeous sunset clouds; they fresco the heavens and carpet the earth, the ceiling and floor of our home below. We cannot overestimate our indebtedness to the rain for the manifold charms of our existence here.

Nor is this beauty on the surface all. The crystals that stud the rocks and flame in their caverns, the gold and silver, the coal and iron, are the filterings of the water. Water is a universal solvent. It dissolves first, and then selects out of the solution the most precious elements and combines and builds them into richer and rarer forms—the diamond and amethyst, the topaz and jasper, the carbuncle and sapphire. It filters the precious metals into the seams and fissures of the rocks. The rain carries to the pearl oyster the material out of which he makes his creamy jewel, and to the coral insect the substance out of which he rears his red-roofed island home. Beneath us, then, and above us, and all about, are the wonderful works of the rain.

Again, the rain is the great equalizer of the temperature of the globe. The oceans under the tropics are a vast steam boiler. The sun is the central fire. Great masses of vapor are created which spring into the upper regions, where they are met by aerial currents, which bear it, on the one hand, to the south, and on the other toward the north, conveying the heat of the tropics toward either pole. As these vapors, all packed with caloric, come into our cooler zones and sweep against the mountain ranges, they are condensed and give out their latent heat. A south wind always raises the temperature.

This equalizing current is continually kept up. The heated vapor is ever traveling to us, while our cold, crisp air moves southward, to refresh and invigorate the tropics. The process is precisely similar to the method of heating buildings by steam. Water is raised to vapor by the fire under the boiler. It ascends to the cold rooms above, is condensed, gives out its latent heat to warm the apartment, and then returns to the boiler in the form of water. What men do on a small scale the great Architect does on the scale of the universe. This process of heating is God's patent.

Without this constant circulation, carried on by the agency of the rain, but a small part of the globe would be habitable. The heat of the tropics would be intolerable, while large portions of the temperate zones, now the most densely populated, would be one mass of eternal snow and ice. This is among the most beneficent uses of the rain. It is the pack-mule to bring the heat of the torrid zone to the temperate, and bear back the cool breezes of the north to allay the heat and languor of the equatorial regions.

POWER CONCERNED IN FORMING RAIN.

Water is one of the most quiescent of substances, and reveals no trace of the immense force concerned in its production. Yet its history reveals the presence of a force before

which we stand utterly amazed. Water is composed of two gases, hydrogen and oxygen. Now the power necessary to cause eight pounds of oxygen to unite with one pound of hydrogen, forming nine pounds of water, would lift forty-seven millions of pounds one foot. What a power is exerted, with perfect silence and ease, in every rain storm! This is one of the most wonderful things connected with the rain. "I have seen," says Tyndall, "the wild stone avalanche of the Alps smoke and thunder down their declivities with a vehemence almost sufficient to stun the beholder; I have seen the snow-flakes descending so softly as not to hurt the fragile spangles of which they are composed. Yet to produce from aqueous vapor an amount of snow a child could carry demands a power that would gather up the scattered blocks of the largest stone avalanche, and pitch them to twice the height from whence they fell." "It is usual," says Professor Cooke, "to suppose that the grand in nature is to be seen in great waterfalls and lofty mountains; but to the intellectual eye there is more evidence of omnipotence in a single rain drop, than in the roar of Niagara, or the magnitude of Mont Blanc. Of all the materials of our globe, water bears most conspicuously the stamp of the great Designer and teaches the most impressive lessons of his wisdom and power."

SYMBOLISM OF RAIN.

You meet with it as a symbol in all languages, ancient and modern, in poetry and science, in argument and philosophy. It is woven into all languages and thought. This is conspicuously seen in the Bible and as a religious symbol.

If one searches the sacred oracles to learn the state of man in sin, he is a desert, a dry and thirsty land, where is no water. The selfish heart is all chapped by drought. It is a cistern that holds no water. By no other symbol can the waste and moral ruin of evil courses be so vividly set forth as by the absence of rain. Men and nations wilt and wither

under them, as a land without moisture. All that men most fear and dread comes in the track of the drought. So all the wretchedness of which human society and the heart are capable is strongly typed by the failure of the rain.

If one seeks for the most expressive symbol of moral cleansing and regeneration he will find it in water. "Wash me, and I shall be clean;" as though David would have the Almighty wash his spirit, as soiled clothing is cleansed in pure water. "The washing of regeneration." The grace and cleansing power of great and good thoughts come down upon men, young men especially, as rain upon the fields that have been mown. They sink down to the fine roots of character and conduct, and start a new and nobler life. They wash the penitent nature of all the dregs and sediment of evil, and bury them so deep in the great ocean of infinite love, they will never offend it more.

The breadth and generosity of the provision made to cleanse and restore human nature is illustrated by the abundance of water, "Come ye to the waters." "Whosoever will, let him drink freely." You seem to hear the water as it ripples and sings along many biblical metaphors, and see the dew sparkling on many pages of the Bible, as on the fields about the base of old Hermon. The rain and the dew are among the most expressive as well as frequent illustrations of the benevolence and goodness of God in all languages, both pagan and Christian. The Saviour of mankind, who used language with such expressive beauty and force, finds his most available and fitting illustration in water. The gentle plash and murmur of running brooks and sparkling springs are heard in his most gracious and winsome words, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Christ pours out his great compassionate love as the tropical rain. It never returns to him void, but accomplishes the cleansing

and beautifying of human souls and characters, as the rain that comes oft and gently upon the earth cleanses it and clothes it with verdure and grace. The new life which he brings to men is a river proceeding out of the throne of God. Close by that throne is a vast sea of pleasure, whose gentle waves ripple and break along sands of gold.

The use of water is universal in all languages, to express freedom, generosity, benevolence, and broad expansive thoughts and beneficence, as in nature. You can scarce open a book or read a page, that water is not used to illustrate some thought or principle. The Bible is full of seas and lakes and rivers and springs. To the Oriental imagination no one thing was so expressive as water. His thoughts were full of it.

When, moreover the sacred writers attempt to convey to us some conception of the future world and the condition of souls after death, they turn to the metaphor of water. The land of lost spirits is a land without water. Its absence is the utmost symbol of distress. "Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my parched tongue." A place without water. Thirst with nothing to quench it. What vivid, graphic imagery! What bold painting!

Heaven, on the other hand, is a city full of water. It would be as impossible for an Eastern writer, who had been in the desert and suffered from the simoon, to paint heaven without a plenty of water, as to paint a landscape without trees. Every-where in the land of the blessed dead there are fountains and springs of water. A great river, clear as crystal, flows along tree-fringed banks, through every part of the celestial city. The skies are full of moisture. Clouds fretted and fringed with gold float in the crystalline air. No figure could fasten upon the minds of those among whom the Scriptures were written, so vividly, the contrast between Hades and Heaven, as the absence and presence of water.

Ah! how full of instruction and life and beauty, of joy and

health, of riches and treasures, how eloquent of power and majesty, of grace and grandeur, strength and beauty, is the rain! How full of wisdom and knowledge is every little drop as it comes riding down through the air, to commence its journey through rivulet and river, back to the great ocean whence it came! Surely the rain hath a Father, and through it he speaks and works, in ten thousand ways, to help and instruct, to bless and enrich his children.

THE RAIN.

[THOUGHT-OUTLINE TO HELP THE MEMORY.]

1. How caused? Amount of water on the earth? Air saturated? Annual rainfall? Water in our bodies, in plants, etc.?
2. Distribution of rain? Uses of rain? Steam....Life....Healing....Luxury
....Purifies the air....Beauty...Equalizer of temperature.
3. Power of rain? Symbolism?



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